

**Angela Wu**  
**Reflection on Sankofa**

As I look back on the Sankofa trip over this spring break, I am again empowered by the extraordinary things God has done on this journey toward justice. This experience deepened my understanding of the suffering and brokenness in this world; yet, it also showed me tiny ripples of hope stirred up by people's simple faith in God that are continuing to create a powerful current. On the trip we met with Rosa Park's Pastor, Reverend Graetz, who encouraged us, "Even at a young age, you are called to do something." Many of those who paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement responded to this calling of righteousness and reconciliation, and the calling is still the same for us today. Through Sankofa I was inspired by the lives of those who tried to lift up what God intended the world to be, and their stories gave me the courage to be an active part of this plan. One of the most powerful moments of the trip for me was hearing Reverend Graetz and Mrs. Graetz's testimony. Their obedience to God's calling and their out-pouring love for God and others challenged me to fearlessly live out my faith and trust in God's promises and His provision of strength as I respond to His calling. In a nutshell, the Sankofa experience created an intersection where history and I could meet, and even more, it showed me where I can go from there.

**Edwin Gonzalez**  
**Reflection on Sankofa**

Dreams and hopes can only go so far without action. However, a brief analysis of this action must be done in order to exhaust the outcomes. When doing so one is then able to see how they can go about achieving such dream so that it can happen or at least work towards making it happen. It has to be planned out before we can approach it. Dreams under a positive light are possible. Some would agree and others would disagree, but this optimism isn't a thought of its own created from nothing. It is a thought influenced by the events in our history, people in our history and other matters in which have shaped our lives as we know them through dreaming. However, dreaming is almost impossible for some when they are negated their right to do so.

Martin Luther King along with other leaders and people who were fed up with the racial injustices done onto them gathered together with dreams and hopes to overcome discrimination and the hardships they experienced for being Africa-American. Their dreams were not only thoughts, but they were put to the test through their actions. The civil rights movement was all about exhausting thoughts in order to achieve unity. We can see through this analysis what dreams can do once they are civilly acted upon. Sadly, what I see today is history, in one way or another, repeating itself and the unrest is irrevocable. People of color suffer and will continue to suffer if we do not reflect on our past and realize how we are subconsciously affecting those now and those to come with our actions. I do not point fingers at who the oppressors are but I can say that there are victims and if there are victims we know that there are people who are accountable for this suffering.

If there is anything to take from Sankofa is its name and how it epitomizes the idea of moving forward. I cannot agree more with the name of the program and its definition, "Looking back in order to move forward." In order for our dreams to become possible we must work together as God's children, but if we do not reflect on our history, it is bound to repeat itself and because of this, dreams and hopes will only be ideal and seemingly impossible.

**Kayla Felten**  
**Reflection on Sankofa**

When I reflect on what I experienced during my Sankofa trip, I have mixed feelings. Don't get me wrong, I am incredibly thankful for all of the memories and feelings, some inspirational, warm, and fuzzy, and others discouraging, cynical, and hopeless. Sankofa is a mind and (hopefully) life transforming opportunity for students; one that I cannot express how grateful I am to have been given the chance to attend. When I think about the hands and feet of Jesus, I think of movements that change the world. People who have a high standard of social justice, as inspired by Jesus' life, join together to continue a movement that the Holy Spirit began. The Civil Rights movement was neither the beginning nor the end, but it is one of the most tangibly recognizable pieces of this spiritual work on earth.

Today in the world, more specifically America, more specifically Minnesota, more specifically the Twin Cities, and even more specifically Bethel University faces the same struggles humanity has encountered for centuries. Racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamaphobia, ethnocentrism, white privilege, and general disparities of wealth and power are but a few of the atrocities I see. I genuinely believe that every single one of these issues can be seen today on our campus. This is not to say that Bethel is "worse off" than any other campus or institution, as these issues are a symptom of something far greater than our small community in Arden Hills. This was my inspiration for attending this trip.

As we traveled together, we built beautiful relationship with other students and professors, we learned from the history of our country, we cried as we recognized these same events happening in our present lives, we prayed together and benefited from devotions that reminded us of our one true leader of all civil rights efforts past and present, and we laughed with each other when the time was right to simply enjoy the road trip. For me, this trip was significantly spiritual. Of course it was academic, emotional, and empowering, but mostly it was a reminder that the body of Christ does exist on earth. The civil rights movement for me was the most vivid picture I have encountered of all the limbs in this body coming together to be moved by the Holy Spirit to fulfill a most holy and just cause.

**David Kim**  
**Reflection on Sankofa**

This was my third Sankofa, my second with Bethel. Because of my own development in this journey, this time was different for me. Instead of absorbing all of the new information, as I had on the past two trips, I used this time to self-reflect, to look back at my own story in order to envision my calling in the future. In doing this, I acted in the spirit of Sankofa, which in Akan, the language of Ghana, literally means "to go back and take." We look at this spirit in the form of a bird that is walking forward while looking back, a paradoxical image of progress and process, both needed for authentic change.

As I went through the sites—the museums, the restaurants, the monuments—I thought often of where I have been on this journey to awareness. It was a humbling exercise; I realized how truly young I am, and how much I have to learn. It was empowering to acknowledge my own struggle and reflect on where I had been. Specifically as a leader who is often looked to regarding issues of oppression, I needed

something to check me, to provide me with some accountability. I found that in the leaders, both out front and behind the scenes, of the Civil Rights Movement.

We all need to look back into our history, as well as our own stories. We must acknowledge and confess where we have been in the journey to true reconciliation, that we might find healing. This is not to detract from the restitution piece of reconciliation, in which there a material shift from the ruling party to the oppressed, in order to find restoration. We see this exemplified in the Zacchaeus story in Luke 19.

### **Ning Zhang** **Reflection on Sankofa**

Sankofa, according to the Akan people of West Afrika, refers to a mythic bird that turns his head backward while he is flying forward. Akan people believe that in order to move forward, we need to constantly go back to our roots and take the best of what our past can offer us.

This perception of time and history is at odds with the linear perception of time that we hold today. Linear perception, informed by the theory of modernity and evolution since the Enlightenment era, teaches us to face forward while we march from savagery to civilization, and from darkness to light as if we were on an evolutionary escalator. Let's turn our back on the past. People say, "Let's forget about it, and move forward. Oh please don't look back, don't you know that the force of progress would turn you into a status of salt?"

I can't help but think of Walter Benjamin's angel of history:

"A Klee drawing named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling ruin upon ruin and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

The violent storm of progress propelled the angel into the future, while he has yet to "awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed." We have yet to come to terms with that catastrophe of the past, and clean the debris that has been hurled in front of our feet. In the past, lies the resolution of our anxiety, and therefore lies the future.

While Benjamin's angel of history is clouded by death and sorrow, Sankofa speaks of hope and life. If you look at the picture closely, you will notice that the bird holds something in its mouth. Some people say it's the egg of the future. We will not lose sight of the future as long as we can constantly examine our past. "Whatever we have lost, forgotten, forgone or been stripped of, can be reclaimed, revived, preserved and perpetuated" (web: "the meaning of the Sankofa bird").

We had a sankofa retreat at the Elim Church, northeast Minneapolis. The goal is to prepare us for the trip ahead and get us to know one another.

The powerful moment came as Karen led us to do a simulation.

"It was so real!" A student claimed afterwards. Yes, it was so real that many of us became emotional when the time came for us to share our feelings.

The simulation made us see the power of our current system (the game). In the simulation, we tried to maximize the total value of our chips, but we played by the rules and no one even thought about that maybe we could drop out of the game or overthrow it.

In reality, we also feel extremely weak when facing the systemic racism, systemic classism and systemic sexism. I'm not saying that it's not important to work on the individuals and bring about change within our sphere of influence. But it is this unjust system that we are part of reinforcing and perpetuating the current situation. This system is so capable of segregating the population, dehumanizing the subordinate groups, blaming the victims, persecuting them and keeping them at the bottom.

This is the "cleverness" of the modern governmentality: it provides the subordinate groups with a few means to improve their conditions. These means are not only so limited, but also carefully chosen and calculated so that they are not capable of shaking or destabilizing the system. The members of the subordinate groups have received this rationalization that is if they try these means, try really hard, they could really improve their conditions. Some succeeded, but majority failed. But as long as there are "winners", people will keep trying, and then no one will care to look for the possibilities to drop out of or resist the system. Today oppression is achieved not through direct confrontation and conflict, but through manipulatory means of indoctrinating false consciousness and legalizing the oppression.

In his work "Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison," Foucault documented the radical shift of the means of governing since the 19th century. According to Foucault, the birth of the prison in the 19th century reflected a radical shift in the punishment of the convict away from the violent public display of the torture toward creating "docile bodies" through disciplinary means.

The significance of this transition is this: in the past (prior to the 19th century) the poor and marginal people were not part of the game of the powerful, the rich and the nobles. Public punishment of the convict, more often than not, magnified the disparity between the haves and have-nots, and thus often created a site of conflict between the powerful and the powerless at the convict's body. In other words, when you are excluded from the privileged world, you nevertheless gain a space to resist, rebel and even overthrow the game. The Storming of the Bastille that occurred in Paris on the night of July 14, 1789 manifests this very well.

But all that has changed since the 19th century. The birth of the prison was really at the core of this transition. Instead of using the direct force on the body of the convicts, the dominant group seeks to create the "docile bodies" by the disciplinary means so that the subordinate groups can be manipulated and used, rather than just oppressed, to meet the interests of the dominant. In other words, now the

poor and the marginal people are part of the game, even given the "chips" to play in the game. The novelty or cleverness of this shift is this: once included in the game, no one has the space to resist or rebel the system any longer because they have the stakes in the game, the stakes are so high that overthrowing the system won't be an option now. Also, they were given the false consciousness that they are playing for their own interests, but in fact, only few of them could succeed. But the successful stories are desirable enough to allure all to participate in and even defend this game and the system we are part of.